759 [465] Although as to fees, they said, "It is as you please," these women received as a rule the higher honoraria of 10, 20, and 30 baht. They did not have a separate teacher-rite but paid their respects during regular temple events, such as offering a pig's head and the other items during someone's ordination, though the Muslim midwife had her modified teacher-rite in a separate home ceremony, not at the mosque (cf. [212] Appendix:Muslim Customs). It was even said of the best female midwife that "she had a book." She was literate in [214] Thai. Even if her book were a popular astrological guide, it carried the reverence accorded all books. Whatever it was, its possession increased her aura of reliability. [789] Though the women did not receive their magic at the temple but rather from a kinsman in the maternal line, their incantations, which appeared to be in the Pali-Thai tradition, were no less effective.

759 The professional midwives, both men and women, saw themselves as individual custodians of sacred knowledge and competent in a technique. They were not only interested and ready, but obligated to give expert care to anyone, anywhere it was needed.

The non-professional midwives always thought of themselves as voluntary helpers of kinsmen, acting "out of pity" and carrying on their female responsibility for new life as [562] older women helping their younger relatives. The idea of giving nurture and assistance was so deeply ingrained in the female office that the professional midwives saw themselves fundamentally as volunteers.

Learning Midwifery

The decision to deliver a daughter or a wife was not momentous. One did not have to be "suk" to deliver a baby. The same practical and compassionate motives that led a mother or husband to do this led some of these people to seek out professional techniques so that they might "help more." One woman, bearing her own child at 25 with intense suffering, became angry (chap thai) because "the midwife did nothing to help, but just sat and chewed betel while others did all the work." In desperation she called in her own mother to deliver her. She also "felt she had many relatives who would need her help." Another was asked by her mother's brother, a midwife, to accompany him as he was getting too old. He then gave her his magic. A man took up the specialty after his first child, a son, died at birth from ineptness, he thought, of the midwife. Another man, though, took it up as a "minor extra" to his career as a [illegible]. All learned the skill by accompanying and helping an